

A Tale of Two Cities: EDXC conference in Bratislava and Vienna

Part 1 – Slovakia

The 2018 European DX Council (EDXC) conference was held between Friday 31st August and Monday 3rd September, initially in a forest park just outside the Slovak capital Bratislava at Hotel West, before moving onto Vienna (Austria). 35 participants from 13 countries attended and enjoyed a varied programme of talks, plus radio station and sightseeing tours: 10 from Finland, 5 from Germany, 5 from the UK, 3 from Russia, 2 from Denmark, 2 from Japan, 2 from the USA and one each from Austria, Belgium, France, India, Italy and Poland.

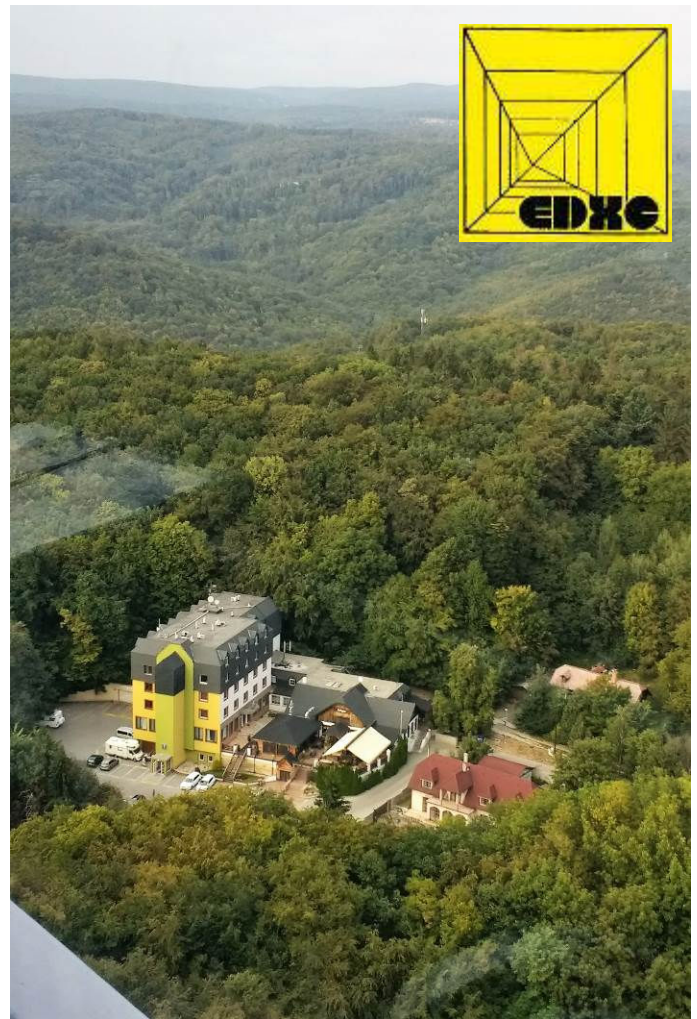
Before even crossing the Slovak border during the 45-minute coach journey from Vienna airport to Bratislava, my portable Philips radio had tuned in 10 Slovak DAB+ stations (surprisingly not listed in WRTH 2018). The multiplex on channel 12C 227.360MHz IDed as Towercom which we were soon to discover transmitted from the landmark Kamzik Tower on the same 439m high hill as (and towering over!) our conference hotel, Hotel West.

right: Conference hotel from the Kamzik tower

The hill-top location of our hotel also meant FM reception was possible from Austria (e.g. Radio Wien 89.9 and Ö24 102.5, both Vienna) and Hungary (e.g. Kossuth Radio 87.6 Győr and Dankó Radio 102.3) as well as Slovakia.

Some delegates arrived on the day before the conference started, and we took a 5 Euro taxi trip down into Bratislava that evening to eat and drink, and also meet up with WRMI's Jeff White and wife Thais who were attending the HFCC (High Frequency Co-ordinating Committee) B18 conference, coincidentally also being held in Bratislava. Jeff and Thais would join us at the EDXC conference on Saturday.

After breakfast the following day (Friday), minibuses took us down into Bratislava to visit Slovak Radio (Slovenský Rozhlas) in their striking "inverted pyramid" headquarters (see photo below), the spacious foyer of which has a nice display of old radio sets (*Tesla Minor 3001B* right) and other historic equipment from 82 years of Slovak and Czech Radio. Plus there's a golden man with his head in a radio set – a 2-metre high version of one of the statuettes awarded to Slovak bands and musicians at Radio_FM's annual "Radio_Head Awards".





Our guide around the building was Anca Dragu from Radio Slovakia International's English section, "Slovakia Today" which is just one of the nine government radio stations based there: S1 Radio Slovensko (National programme on FM and DAB+); S2 Radio Regina (3 regional stations on MW (at night) and FM); S3 Radio Devín (cultural programme on FM and DAB+); S4 Radio_FM (pop, rock, alternative music station on FM and DAB+); S5 Radio Patria (minorities programme on MW (daytime), FM and DAB+). Plus on DAB+ only: Radio Junior (children's) and Radio Litera (spoken word). SR's website also lists Radio Pyramida, not heard on FM or DAB+, so online and satellite only?

right: guide Anca Dragu, Alan Roe & Chrissy Brand.



Radio Slovakia International is carried on FM in Bratislava on Radio Patria 98.9 (transmitted from the roof of the building) in the evening and overnight. RSI's "Slovakia Today" is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2018, coinciding with the "Velvet Divorce" which saw Slovakia and the Czech Republic agree to separate from the combined Czechoslovakia in 1993. This followed just four years after the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989 which saw the end of communism.

Construction of the steel-framed Slovenský Rozhlas building was however begun during the communist era in 1967, though not completed until 1983. Built especially for radio's needs, it is

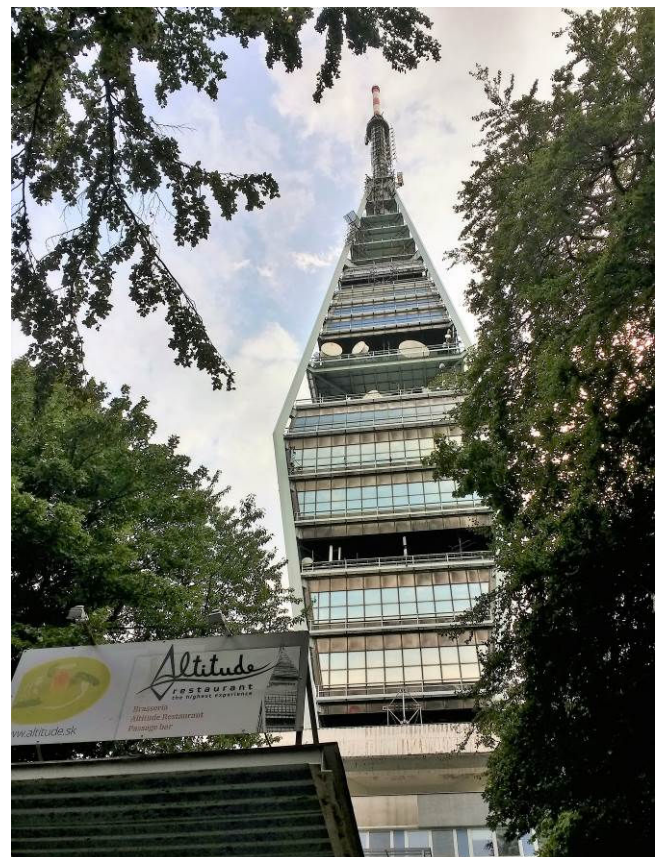
80 metres high (to the tip of its rooftop aerial) and the design was chosen following a competition. It actually consists of two inverted pyramids, one inside the other, with the inner pyramid housing a noise free space for studios, concert halls and production rooms, with the outer pyramid acting as a sound buffer as well as accommodating offices. We visited the impressive 523 seat concert hall which is spring-mounted for excellent acoustics and houses a large 6,373 pipe organ, claimed to be the biggest in Central Europe. Concerts by the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra plus other classical and pop music concerts are held there, some are free. (No photos were allowed inside the building, but this film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oetUtpowAqq> from 2013 shows much of what we saw, including two of the radio studios visited in our tour).

Each of the six language sections of Radio Slovakia International (RSI) (French, English, Russian, German, Slovak and Spanish) has an office. Their daily half hour programmes can be heard on a number of platforms including shortwave (though not from transmitters in Slovakia): in North America via WRMI and in Europe via Shortwave Service Kall, plus locally on FM 98.9 in Bratislava (see <http://enrsi.rtvs.sk/how-to-listen>). The impression I got from walking round the impressive Slovak Radio HQ that Friday morning was there was a lot of empty space. It has never housed the number of employees it was designed for (around 1500) and today maybe only has half that number. Plus, in today's digital age, radio and studio equipment needs a much smaller space than when it was designed 50 years ago. Today it is costly to heat, light and maintain, with no expense spared in its original construction materials (e.g. travertine tiles). Bratislava's main bus station, built at the same time, is being demolished and travertine from it is being used to renovate Slovak Radio's pyramid. The building was declared a national cultural monument at the end of 2017 meaning it has to be maintained. We left Slovak Radio with goody bags, including a cardboard cut-out model to construct of the building!

Back at our hotel, the afternoon conference session included two interesting talks. After EDXC Secretary-General, Kari Kivekas, welcomed everyone, Jarmo Salmi presented "Small antennas in an Urban Environment", introducing a variety of compact aerials including the PA0RDT mini-whip and MFJ-1024 (outdoor) and MFJ-1022 (indoor) active aerials.

C.K. Raman from Delhi, India gave the delegates an insight into DXing in his country, where DXers are located and what catches can be made across the spectrum on SW, MW, LW and FM. Indian DXers have a net on 7080 kHz for exchanging tips. C.K illustrated his talk with some recordings: e.g. VLF stations JJY on 60 kHz, LW Mongolian Radio on 164 kHz, MW Lao National Radio on 567 and the strongest Japanese station in India, JOGB on 873 kHz.

Later that afternoon we walked up the hill from our hotel to the landmark Kamzik TV tower built on a 437m high hill, part of the Little Carpathian range which overlooks Bratislava. Construction of the 194m high tower began in 1967 and was completed in 1975. The tower is used to transmit FM and DAB+ radio stations, as well as TV. We took the high speed lift up to the enclosed observation deck, 109m above the ground, which also has a bar and gives views on a fine day of three bordering countries as well as Bratislava. Some of us returned later to eat in the Altitude restaurant, which has rotating floor to give diners a 360 degree panoramic view whilst they eat.



The Kamzik tower was hidden in the clouds as we set out in the rain by coach for a sight-seeing tour of Bratislava the next morning, including a walking tour of the city's old centre (*below left*).



A nice surprise then as our coach drove across the border into Hungary and stopped by the medium wave transmitter site near the town of Mosonmagyaróvár, about 15km from the border. This Antenna Hungaria mast (*above right*) transmits Dankó Rádió on 1116 kHz (5kW). The Mosonmagyaróvár mast on 1116kHz before 2013 carried Magyar Rádió regional station from the nearby city of Győr. Dankó Rádió is a Hungarian music station, named after famous gypsy composer Dankó Pista (1858-1903). Then, after stopping at a huge Tesco hypermarket (!), we enjoyed a lunch of home-made Hungarian soup and beer at Korzó restaurant in the old town of Mosonmagyaróvár itself.

Returning across the border into Slovakia, our coach then headed back to Hotel West for the afternoon talks. Harald Süss of the Austrian DX Board (ADXB) welcomed us (we would travel to Vienna the following day) then gave an interesting illustrated talk on the history of GMT and the Greenwich Meridian (a time measure universally used in our hobby of course).

Next, Jukka Kotovirta reported on the "FM Summer 2018" season in Finland: although the start in June was promising, DXpeditions in Utö and Virolahti were "catastrophic". Best day for Sporadic E reception (E's) was July 12th. Historically 2004-2017 (based on number of loggings) June 8th has been the best date. Jukka plugged Gabriel EA6VQ's invaluable www.dxmaps.com site and told us logs posted on the www.FMlist.org site automatically fed into DX Maps. Finally, a European record for Tropospheric DX reception? A Polish DXer 30km south of Warsaw heard YLE Puhe 100.7 (inside the Arctic Circle in Northern Finland) – a distance of 1743km!

Jeff White from WRMI next told us that as well as being General Manager of WRMI, he is Chair of HFCC and Chair of NASB (National Association of Shortwave Broadcasters). He had last attended an EDXC conference in the 1980s he said and told us a little about HFCC which aims to co-ordinate shortwave spectrum usage amongst broadcasters. 85% of shortwave broadcasters participate in HFCC and the conference in Bratislava had 72 attendees from 40

organisations. HFCC was founded in 1990 when broadcasters first met in Bulgaria. Its founder, Oldrich Cip, sadly passed away on 27th July this year. His son Vladislav, is secretary of HFCC. Future HFCC meetings are scheduled for Tunis (A19), Buenos Aires (B19), Hainan, China (A20) and Sydney Australia (B20). You can read more on the HFCC website at <http://www.hfcc.org/group.phtml>. NASB is an association of private shortwave stations in the USA (plus overseas associate members). Their last meeting was at the former HCJB technology centre in Indiana.

Jeff (*photo right*) then gave us a brief history of his station WRMI from its founding in 1989, when it hired airtime (e.g. on Radio Clarin). In 1994 it went on air from its own transmitter, near Miami for the first time. It used this site for 20-odd years until being asked in 2013 if they wanted to take over the Okeechobee site used by Family Radio which had just closed. The site of 1 square mile is owned by a cattle ranch. On December 1st 2013 the Miami site closed and WRMI started transmissions from Okeechobee. Jeff gave us a summary of organisations which currently rent airtime on WRMI and said the operation has 10 staff and is largely automated, though there is one person in the control room 24 hours. He said the European antennas had suffered hurricane damage and were not yet repaired. Also that a month-long test was being made in September for Radio Marti on 5950 kHz. Jeff added that various DX programmes aired on WRMI, but there was currently no European DX report. Jeff's wife Thais, then kindly made a prize-draw for various WRMI souvenirs.



Saturday evening saw the traditional EDXC banquet in Restaurant Schoppa next to our hotel with a very filling Slovak meal of bryndzove halusky: potato dumplings, cheese & crunchy bacon.

The final conference session on Sunday morning began with an illustrated talk by former EDXC Secretary-General, Risto Vähäkainu on his trip to USA, calling at Iceland (including RUV) en route, then attending the SWL Fest in Pennsylvania and also visiting shortwave stations WRMI in



Okeechobee FL and WINB in Red Lion PA. We then watched a 17-minute film about the "New Life Station", KNLS, with studios and headquarters in Franklin TN, USA and shortwave transmitters in Anchor Point, Alaska & Madagascar.

Secretary-General Kari Kivekäs (*photo left at the banquet*) closed the conference with an update on "EDXC Topics". He read out

greetings from around the world to the conference and gave an update on the EDXC blog <https://edxcnews.wordpress.com/> and Facebook page. The EDXC is in a sound financial position with 14 member clubs in Europe (and 2 Observer clubs) plus 7 individual members. The venue for the 2019 conference is yet to be confirmed, but Andorra had been suggested as one possible venue. Kari concluded the proceedings by saying he and Jan-Mikael (Assistant Secretary-General) had been in office now for six years – who's next?

Checking out of Hotel West, we then travelled west by coach to Vienna (see *Part 2!*).



Above: (most of) the EDXC delegates at Hotel West, Bratislava



“Radio Heads” statue (Slovak Radio HQ)



Kamzik radio & TV tower

(© Alan Pennington and British DX Club (BDXC-UK) October 2018)